

Opening Statement of Senator Charles E. Grassley
Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control
Hearing on Counternarcotics in the Andean Region
Wednesday, October 19, 2011

Madam Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today to review counternarcotics efforts in the Andean Region. Today's hearing gives us the opportunity to discuss what we have learned ten-plus years since Plan Colombia was first implemented. It also provides an opportunity to hear from representatives from the Administration about the direction of our counternarcotics programs looking forward.

First, I want to address problem that has resulted in the suspension of vital counternarcotics around the world. I have been told that funding for three main international counter-narcotics provisions were not funded in the Continuing Resolution passed by Congress in September. It is my understanding that this was a result of congressional dysfunction and not, as reported, a failure on the part of anyone at the DoD.

This snafu has resulted in the suspension of programs such as intelligence analysis, equipment maintenance, and the detection and monitoring of drug cartels. It will also cost the taxpayers millions to restart these programs at a time when everyone is being asked to tighten their belts.

DoD informed my staff that they are working around the problem fairly well, but this puts the safety and security of our country at risk.

Today, drug trafficking and related violence in Mexico, Afghanistan and Central America, not Colombia, have been at the forefront. We must not forget, though, that illegal narcotics flowing into the United States still come from South America.

According to the DEA, last year's total potential cocaine production for the Andean Region is 790 metric tons, an increase in production after two years of decreases. Peru surpassed Colombia as the world's largest producer of cocaine. Peru produced 225 metric tons to 325 metric tons compared to 270 metric tons for Colombia.

These production numbers show that we cannot become complacent. We must continue to support our Western Hemisphere neighbors in South America who have chosen to fight, rather than join, the narco-traffickers who threaten their safety and security.

I continue to support a three-pronged approach for an effective counter-narcotics program which includes eradication, interdiction and economic development. This approach has proven to be very successful in Colombia.

The Government of Colombia and its citizens, in partnership with the United States, have weakened and dismantled rebel organizations that have historically controlled drug production.

The result: Violence is down, security is up and cocaine production is less than half what it was in 2001. I have fully supported these efforts to provide a wide-range of assistance to Colombia through Plan Colombia.

Although it is early in his tenure, Peruvian President Humala has said the fight against drug trafficking is “essential.” He has called for a comprehensive approach which includes effort to halt money laundering and precursor chemical trafficking. We have supported Peruvian efforts in the past and look forward to continuing this effort.

As we know, Venezuela, Bolivia, and even Ecuador, have been very vocal about their opposition to U.S. counter-narcotics efforts. All three countries have been listed on the U.S. presidential list of major drug producing and trafficking countries. But, Bolivia and Venezuela were designated as “failed demonstrably” for not meeting the requirements of the counter-narcotics agreements.

Presidents Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales have vocally opposed U.S. counter-narcotics programs and support. The result for both countries has been increased government involvement in the drug production and trafficking through both countries.

We continue to hear about how Venezuela has increasingly become a transshipment point for cocaine coming out of South America. I am very concerned about this development and would like to know what we are doing to stop it. I also would like to know about the growing ties between Iran and Venezuela and whether the transshipment routes being utilized to move narcotics could also be used for the movement of illegal items. Venezuela’s involvement in regional drug trafficking threatens to destabilize other nations in the region and should be taken seriously.

In Ecuador, President Correa has taken steps to distance the country from the United States. The decision not to renew the U.S. lease of the Manta Airbase and removal of all U.S. military personnel from Ecuador is but one example. Meanwhile, the government uses counternarcotics assistance from the U.S. to combat the traffickers who transport drugs through his country.

Finally, I want to thank Chairman Feinstein for joining me as a cosponsor on our legislation to overhaul the nation’s money laundering laws. Yesterday, we introduced the Combating Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing, and Counterfeiting Act of 2011. This legislation follows-up on a hearing held in the Caucus earlier this year. It will strengthen our money laundering statutes and make it more difficult for criminals, drug traffickers, and terrorists to finance their operations by closing loopholes in our laws that allow them to move money around the world. I thank her for joining me as the original cosponsor and look forward to passing this into law.

I thank the witnesses for being here to testify today and I look forward to hearing the testimony from the witnesses. I want to ask them some questions about other changes in the region and ways we can continue our efforts to attack this multi-faceted problem. Thank you.